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WESTERN EUROPE – CANADA – INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

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French Communists Approve West European Communist-Socialist Meeting on Portugal...Later

/ French and Italian Communists have responded hesitantly to Portuguese Socialist leader Soares' call for a conference of Southern European Socialist and Communist parties to discuss Portugal.

3 / Adopting a stalling tactic, French Communist party leader George Marchais argued in his reply last week that solidarity of the left in West Europe is too important for such a meeting to be restricted to Portugal, France, Italy and Spain, and suggested other European parties be invited as well. He probably hopes the difficulty of organizing any such meeting will postpone concrete preparations until the situation in Portugal is more settled, or that the proposal will be forgotten. Marchais realizes that on most issues his party would be in agreement only with the Portuguese Communists--should they attend, which is doubtful--and does not want to further emphasize his party's isolation to the French electorate.

/ The events in Portugal have provoked a quarrel, widely reported in the press, between the French Communists and Socialists in which Marchais has come off second best. His image as the more doctrinaire, inflexible and less democratic leader has been reinforced. His rival, Socialist party secretary Francois Mitterrand, has gained by appearing to be a traditional social democrat who knows the limitations of his alliance with the Communists and can stand up to their ideological assaults.

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the implications of the quarrel for the Communist image in France are now of major concern to the French party's leaders, who hope to be able to lower the tone of the disagreement. This will be difficult, however, because the Portuguese issues touch sensitive nerves in the party that are already irritated by internal debate over the value of continued cooperation with the French Socialists.

Mitterrand quickly accepted Soares' proposal on behalf of the French Socialists. He reportedly will also be meeting within the next two weeks with Socialist leaders Harold Wilson, Willy Brandt and Swedish Prime Minister Palme to discuss aid to Portugal.

The Italian Communists also responded with caution to Soares' proposal. They made a general statement of approval of understandings between West European Communists and Socialists that have been adequately prepared. This circumspection seems to reflect the party's desire to play along, while avoiding if possible polemical exchanges with the Soviets. In recent weeks the Italian Communists seemed to be backing away from their earlier open criticism of the Portuguese Communists' strong-arm tactics.

The Italian Socialists, on the other hand, reacted enthusiastically to Soares' proposal and expressed satisfaction with the Italian Communists' equivocal support. The Socialists are trying to give the impression that they lead the left, in part by avoiding open differences with the Communists. The Socialists also welcomed Soares' proposal as a vindication of their joint communique

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6 with the Communists in mid-August which called for a political agreement between Portuguese "democratic" parties and the Armed Forces Movement. The Socialists drew strong domestic criticism for that act of "neo-frontism" with the Communists.

3 The Spanish parties have yet to respond to Soares' invitation. (Secret No Foreign Dissem)

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New Belgian Economics Minister Named

Prime Minister Tindemans has appointed Fernand Herman, director of the Brussels Economics Institute, to be economics minister, succeeding Andre Oleffe who died last week. Like Oleffe, Herman is a member of the Franco-phone wing of the governing Social Christian Party but not a member of parliament. He has ties with the left wing Christian labor movement, and the respect of industrial and business leaders.

The quick appointment avoided serious intra-cabinet maneuvering that might have weakened the government. Several top ministers reportedly had started to vie for the position. Nevertheless, when parliament reconvenes this fall, the Prime Minister will face a number of serious challenges unless his government is able to deal effectively with Belgium's recession. (Confidential No Foreign Dissem)

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